

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HB 1972

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**As Passed House:**

February 6, 2024

**Title:** An act relating to increasing the licensure fees that support the Washington physicians health program.

**Brief Description:** Increasing the licensure fees that support the Washington physicians health program.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Simmons, Harris, Reed, Ormsby and Riccelli.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Health Care & Wellness: 1/9/24, 1/12/24 [DP];

Appropriations: 1/24/24, 1/29/24 [DP].

**Floor Activity:**

Passed House: 2/6/24, 97-0.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Raises surcharge fees for the Washington Physician Health Program for physicians, osteopathic physicians, podiatric physicians, dentists, physician assistants, and veterinarians.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE & WELLNESS

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 17 members: Representatives Riccelli, Chair; Bateman, Vice Chair; Schmick, Ranking Minority Member; Hutchins, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bronoske, Caldier, Davis, Graham, Harris, Macri, Maycumber, Mosbrucker, Orwall, Simmons, Stonier, Thai and Tharinger.

**Staff:** Benjamin Ratcliff (786-7291) and Jim Morishima (786-7191).

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## HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 28 members: Representatives Ormsby, Chair; Bergquist, Vice Chair; Gregerson, Vice Chair; Macri, Vice Chair; Chambers, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Connors, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Couture, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Berg, Callan, Chandler, Chopp, Davis, Dye, Fitzgibbon, Harris, Lekanoff, Pollet, Riccelli, Rude, Ryu, Sandlin, Schmick, Senn, Simmons, Slatter, Springer, Stonier and Tharinger.

**Staff:** Lily Smith (786-7175).

### **Background:**

#### Washington Physicians Health Program.

If a disciplining authority determines that unprofessional conduct by a licensee may be the result of an applicable impairing or potentially impairing health condition, the disciplining authority may refer the licensee to a physician health program or a voluntary substance use disorder monitoring program approved by the disciplining authority in lieu of disciplinary action. If the licensee does not consent to the referral or fails to meet the requirements of the program, the disciplining authority may take formal disciplinary action against the licensee.

The Washington Medical Commission, the Board of Osteopathic Medicine and Surgery, the Dental Quality Assurance Commission, the Podiatric Medical Board, and the State Veterinarian Board of Governors all contract with the same entity to implement their physician health program. The entity does not itself provide treatment but provides services such as referring practitioners to treatment programs and monitoring compliance.

#### Costs and Fees.

Physician Health Program costs are financed primarily by surcharges on license issuances and renewals. For physicians, osteopathic physicians, podiatric physicians, dentists, and physician assistants, the fee is \$50. For veterinarians, the fee is \$25.

### **Summary of Bill:**

The license surcharge limit for the Physician Health Program of \$50 for physicians, osteopathic physicians, podiatric physicians, dentists, and physician assistants is raised to \$70. The surcharge limit of \$25 for veterinarians is raised to \$35.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Effective Date:** This bill contains multiple effective dates. Please see the bill.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Health Care & Wellness):**

(In support) The Washington Physician Health Program (WPHP) is an invaluable organization that provides confidential and therapeutic services to many health care practitioners in the state of Washington. By providing high-quality care to physicians, osteopathic physicians, podiatric physicians, dentists, physician assistants, and veterinarians for years, the WPHP has earned the trust of practitioners and medical bodies alike. For the WPHP to be able to continue providing their high-quality services, the surcharge fees must occasionally be increased to keep up with costs. These license surcharge fees—which constitute the primary source of funding for the WPHP—are needed to allow the program to expand services for practitioners experiencing a variety of health issues and disorders. The bill would fund outreach and education that would engender greater health among Washington’s health care practitioners, which, in turn, would make for healthier patients. Without this increase, the WPHP would be forced to cut programs and staff.

The last round of increases in surcharge fees, completed between 2009 and 2018, required many petitions to the Legislature for respective healthcare practice areas that require licenses from the Department of Health. This bill would harmonize the fee increase across these different disciplines, making them more efficient and uniform.

(Opposed) None.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Appropriations):**

(In support) License surcharges support a significant amount of funding for the Physician Health Program. There is support from each of the impacted professions for this increase. Increases such as these are periodically necessary to keep pace with inflation and other cost increases.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying (Health Care & Wellness):** Representative Tarra Simmons, prime sponsor; Ken Gordon, Washington State Veterinary Medical Association; Nari Heshmati, MD, Washington State Medical Association; and Chris Bundy and Sheldon Cooper, Washington Physicians Health Program.

**Persons Testifying (Appropriations):** Representative Tarra Simmons, prime sponsor; and Christopher Bundy, Washington Physicians Health Program.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Health Care & Wellness):** None.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Appropriations):** None.